Confronting Modernity, Subjectivity and Nationality: A Study of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and O.V. Vijayan's *The Legends of Khasak*

Synopsis

The dissertation titled **Confronting Modernity, Subjectivity and Nationality: A Study of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and O.V. Vijayan's *The Legends of Khasak***, makes an analysis of two canonical modernist texts in the discursive contexts of the modern / national historiography. The two works, namely *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce and *The Legends of Khasak* by O.V. Vijayan belonging to entirely different and distinct social, cultural and political situations, are contextualized in a colonial / postcolonial praxis. The study attempts to decode the cultural and political constructs embedded in the narrative structures of these texts.

This study attempts an analysis of modernism as the beginning of a process of global transculturation, with particular reference to these texts. In these representative texts, we find evidences to establish that even in these modernist texts, the Empire makes the first move to write back to, and in so doing to displace, the centre. It can also be seen that the crisis brought by the two antithetical worlds entering into conflict, was not an exclusive phenomenon of the period of modernism; it acquires greater propensity in the present postcolonial / globalized world scenario. Writers like James Joyce and O.V. Vijayan position themselves in these cultural and political contexts by giving truthful representations of the postcolonial predicament. We can even find these texts trying to forge with the help of modernist techniques "the uncreated conscience of race" quite outside the boundaries of a monolithic ethnic consciousness.

A Portrait and *The Legends* are seen in the perspective of very strong and vigorous reactions to the ideological, cultural and political positions inculcated in the Irish and Indian societies in the wake of colonialism and modernity. These texts cannot be called purely postcolonial. This study only tries to establish that though these texts belong to the modernist phase, they employ many postcolonial strategies in dealing with issues which are being discussed under postcolonialism like identity, modernity, nationality, hybridity and homogenization. To the heroes Stephen and Ravi issues of identity are

vital, as they are for the colonized. Even though the protagonists are not cast in the figures of the colonized, they present themselves to the modern readers as poignant images of the modern man beset with the complex issues of loss of identity, both collective and individual, as he is caught in the whirlwinds of colonization, homogenization and multiculturalism. The two texts appear to be journeys of inscape of two intensely sensitive and conscientious protagonists, to the depths of subjective ambience where they trace their ethnic cultural and political issues and thereby identify and record their cultural and political historiography.

The study also observes that the so called 'modernist writers' even while envisaging themselves to be inevitable parts of the modern milieu, also regarded it their social and aesthetic responsibility to be on the side of resistance in retaliating against certain pitfalls of its ethos. Their fiction stood for something new, in the face of modernity, to reflect, to fathom or even to redeem modern life. These writers wanted their fiction to make a sense of all the necessities and confusions created by modernity, and they introduced daring and innovative aesthetic experiments in the hope that doing so could reform and redeem culture. Thus it is not the attempt of the modern texts to mirror modernity that is remarkable here; instead it is their adventurous battle with modernity that makes them significant as cultural texts. The study analyses the ways in which Joyce and Vijayan resist the processes of modernity with the purpose of redeeming it by instilling a hope and a desire to restore meaning and beauty to the modern world and thus provide an aesthetic solution to it.

In carving out such an aesthetic solution, James Joyce creates a protean double singleness through the delicate balancing of dichotomies which were brought in by modernity and specifically by the dual colonization of the British Empire and Roman Catholicism. In *A Portrait,* Stephen's indictment of colonialism is directed against his own countrymen for their subservience, as it is against the imperialist ambitions of the British. Joyce also deals with the opposition between the extreme patriotic spirit and the mimicry of colonial values found in Irish nationalism. The dichotomies between the metropolitan and the pastoral paradigms of culture and those between the colonial and the vernacular languages are also reflected in the novel.

A Portrait also deals with the dichotomies between public / national space and private / personal space as well as between public / national time and private / personal time. Stephen makes

an attempt to find a meaning in the city of Dublin by imposing personal / private significances and interpretations on the spectacles and scenes that he comes across on his regular journey. The dichotomy between standardized and mechanized public linearity and the relative and erratic private time that was introduced by modernity is overcome by Joyce in this novel by subverting conventional linearity and by explaining real inner time through the presentation of the chaotic and fluctuating conscious states. He uses stream of consciousness technique as a brilliant resistance strategy against the punctual and mechanized public time imposed by modernity. We find Joyce also dealing with other dichotomies like body and soul, good and bad, right and wrong, York and Lancaster, red and white, coldness and hotness, maroon velvet back and green velvet back of the brush, and so on.

The Legends, written specifically in the Indian context, also records the complexity and intensity of the modern dilemma which was marked by certain socio-political crises. Khasak, posited in the cultural space of intellectual reasoning confronts and resists the danger of invasion by modernity and cast in a mythical frame, it stands as a counter space to modernity. Vijayan endows Khasak with a halo of emotional intensity, ecstatic propensity and primitive exuberance which are lost in the language of the sophisticated modern world. Time stands still in Khasak, as opposed to the hustling time of the modern world outside. Through a plethora of mythical motifs, Vijayan builds up a world of primeval innocence and security as a source of anchorage for the modern man entangled in the acute moment of his dilemma marked by his dissatisfaction with the scientific concept of man as a rational being. *The Legends* is a saga of the triumph of an uninstitutionalized, pristine and premodern vestigial world over the socio-political forces of modernity.

Another important finding of the study is related to the problem of identity which though usually addressed as an epistemological question assumes political and cultural dimensions in these novels. The subjective modernity experienced by the protagonists of these particular novels, though having some affinities with the existential dilemma, is also identified as quite distinct from it and standing closer to the subjective problematic encountered in the colonial/postcolonial predicament. It is also contextualized in the emergence of the nation states that brought in a new cultural identity which sometimes entered into conflict with personal identity. The study traces it on the postcolonial canvass and establishes it as a cultural and political dilemma experienced within the matrix of the hegemonic power structures. The works also try to counteract the absolutism introduced by modernity which projected truth / reality as monolithic. These texts establish that there are numerous

ways of expressing the truth and they prove it through the meaning- giving activity of consciousness in which the technique of epiphany plays an important role.

The protagonists are seen to shred off their pretentions of modernity after the realization of the diffusion of subjectivity caused by it. Ravi completely comes out of his modern individual subjectivity by yielding to the transcendental spectrum of the irrational, primitive and collective consciousness of Khasak. Stephen's decision to leave Ireland is not a rejection of his identity or of his homeland; but he escapes from the colonial construct of the colonized and from the manipulated nationalism of Ireland.

The texts are also contextualized in the political and cultural crises aroused by nationalism and the concept of the nation state. For Joyce and Vijayan, nationalism is not merely a monolithic historic event that stood for political emancipation, but a complex cultural and political process induced by modernization and colonization accompanied by a lot of cultural and social issues. It deals with the struggle between individualism and collectivism that ends up in homogeneity which is wrought with the modern myth of the nation state. The novels also take up the question of freedom, the essence of which is lost in colonialism and which was in danger of being sabotaged in the modern nation state.

In *A Portrait*, the protagonist, Stephen depicts the in-between unbelongingness / double consciousness of a colonized and at the same time he struggles against the chauvinistic, monologic perspective of nationalism which tries to establish an imagined community in postcolonial terms. He is going to transform a reality encountered for the 'millionth time' into something that has so far remained 'uncreated'. His ambition is to 'fly by those nets', to watch the flight of birds from the steps of the National Library as auguries of the future, to invoke Dedalus and Icarus, 'a hawklike man flying sunward above the sea'. Stephen's attempt for a deliverance from the labyrinthine ways of colonialism and nationalism is skillfully presented by Joyce through the Dedalus myth. Like Icarus, he is ready for a flight into fathomless expanses of freedom and choice in order to re-inscribe the multiple and heterogenous essence of Irish culture, and in doing that he adopts a spiritual line of nationalism. Joyce also criticizes the colonial / modern construct of the nation state. In the novel, he makes Stephen aspire to escape from what is politically / socially constructed and to find freedom for himself and for his race beyond the

inherited repertoire which the past has made available and also beyond the narrow national prospects promised by future.

He provides a new possibility of imagining a nation outside the grids of the nation state which is bound with fixed and specific geographical borders through the recreation of primordial and perennial cultural and ethnic propensity of Ireland. Thus he decolonizes the concepts of nationalism and the nation state by taking up the mission of forging in the smithy of his soul, the uncreated conscience of his race thereby foregrounding heterogeneity beyond the essentiality of the Celtic / the Gaelic / the Irish. He challenges the homogenizing agenda of the nation states which converts many-into-one and which still functions as the threat to postcolonial nations. Even while imagining a nation with a cultural distinctiveness collectively, he is thinking about the need for preserving the racial, cultural and religious distinctiveness individually. The Dedalus myth which prologues and epilogues the narrative brilliantly speaks against the maopic chauvinistic and provincial patriotism and reflects his urge to escape out of the racially defined nationalism and the geographically defined boundaries of the nation state.

In *The Legends* Vijayan places the disintegration of modern citizenship and the political reasoning of national modernity in the background of an idyllic antiquity cast through a transcendental language and thus counterpoises the uncertain and ambiguous world with a mystical/mythical/ethereal world. In *The Legends* Vijayan attacks the elitist and the bourgeoisie nature of Indian nationalism which became a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite. He unearths an attempt in the Indian context to nationalize the past which was brahminic and vedic in perspective. Vijayan's attack thus extends to the brahminic tradition that defined national modernity in India. Through the creation of a trans-local world called Khasak where the real community life exists instead of an imagined one, and where each individual is functionally tied up with one another, he provides an alternative to the imagined community. Vijayan also vehemently attacks the homogenizing agenda hidden in the matrices of nationalism and the nation state. It can be seen that the myth of the nation creates an imaginary community by ignoring the diversity of the individuals it seeks to homogenize or to convert the 'many' into 'one.' He attacks the process of creating oneness vogue in pre-independent India which was later eulogized as unity in diversity in the post independent era.

He also exposes the creation of religious / communal identities that happened in the context of colonial modernity and came to be deep rooted during anticolonial struggle and became the defining factor of India's specific national modernity. As a result, nationalism came to be equated with a Hindu religious reasoning which resulted in the othering of Islam, the repercussions of which still continue to endanger the integrity of India. Vijayan places the single teacher District Board School in Khasak and the repercussions it produced in the perspective of colonial nationality by making its pedagogy and projects, the centre of the narrative framework. He recreates a profile of the colonial and postcolonial educational set up in India and shows how the state project of education fails in the mysterious stupor of the indigenous, transcendental knowledge system of Khasak.

This comparative study thus makes some cultural and critical observations about *The Legends of Khasak* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in the background of the postcolonial perspective. It also proves how representative and canonical texts associated with certain movements and times need to be emancipated from their immediate contexts and set in a wider perspective.

Chapter 1 gives an analysis of the postcolonial discourse and an account of the life and works of James Joyce and O.V. Vijayan. They are posited in the socio-cultural contexts that are marked with the dichotomies and confusions produced in the wake of colonial modernity and nationalism.

Chapter 2 analyses how the texts resist the process of modernization at different levels. The chapter analyses how these novels put up resistance to the different processes and tools of modernity.

Chapter 3 tries to analyse the dilemmas of subjectivity in the discursive contexts of the modern and national historiography. It traces the dichotomy of individual and collective identities operating through the texts on an ontological level and in a postcolonial perspective, leading up to a psychological and cosmic resolution.

Chapter 4 discusses the novels in the background of theories of nationalism. The parochial and limited notions of the modern nation states are ridiculed by both the novelists and they provide counter spaces to them through their fictional worlds. It also discusses certain issues like homogenization, hybridity, double consciousness and so on. The last chapter provides the conclusions of the study.